

Validation Report



BN525

Master of Business

(90 ECTS credits leading to NFQ Level 9 Award)

BN522

Postgraduate Diploma in Business

(60 ECTS credits leading to NFQ Level 9 Award)

Introduction

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown was established in 1999. The mission of the Institute is to serve its students and the community by meeting the skills needs in the economy and increasing the level of participation in third-level education and training, particularly in Dublin North-West and its environs.

The Institute in 2006 was awarded delegated authority enabling the development, validation, implementation and continuous improvement of its existing taught higher education and training programmes up to and including level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

In keeping with the Institute's mission statement, course and programme development is on-going. The Department of Business aims to continually update its offering to the local region, ensuring that it delivers qualifications that are timely, appropriate and relevant. As such the department feels it is timely to design and deliver a Level 9 programme in business so as to better serve the needs of Dublin North West and beyond. This programme supports the mission of the Institute and facilitates much wider access to the Institute by a cohort of potential students whose needs are currently not being met.

The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the peer review panel established to validate this proposed programme against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated in the Institute policy document 2MP01¹.

This submission by the School of Business and Humanities evolved through:

- examining the competence, expertise and experience of its staff in addition to the strategy of the department/school/Institute and Government educational policy.
- student led demand for an NFQ Level 9 qualification in business.

¹ 2MP01 Design, validation and accreditation of new academic programmes

Programme overview

Given the current economic climate the Department of Business has proposed this programme in response to research evidence and industry feedback within the Institute's immediate catchment area highlighting a need to produce graduates who are problem solvers and decision makers, who can offer employers in both private and public sectors a portfolio of skills and expertise vital to the success of any organisation operating in an increasingly competitive environment. Furthermore the current vision of the HEA¹ is to foster innovative and creative graduates equipped with the skills needed to perform successfully in a competitive environment and contribute to fostering an enterprise culture. The proposed Master of Business programme is of a one year (12 month) duration.

The proposed programme aims to enable learners to develop advanced core competencies in business, to build on learning and business skills already gained at honours Bachelor of Business Level (or cognate discipline) and to further develop the analytical skills and academic experience of students whilst providing the opportunity to engage in industry research. The curriculum offers a richness and variety of learning that will ensure students develop a range of high-level knowledge and skill in research, strategic thinking and reflective learning. Students will further develop an ability to integrate knowledge, manage complexity and formulate judgements thereby establishing the foundation for a successful career. Students will be immersed in the following core module areas delivered through the use of case studies, team work, group projects, problem based learning and research projects:

- Service excellence
- Strategy and leadership
- Research methods
- Innovation and creativity
- Enterprise resource systems and business intelligence
- Accounting information for decision making

Study of these core areas will produce graduates who are independent and innovative thinkers with a sound understanding of theoretical issues and a leading edge in business thinking.

Strong links will be fostered between students and companies based in the Learning and Innovation Centre (LINC - ITB's tangible link between the Institute and the business community) on campus. The dissertation will provide students

¹ The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland.

with an opportunity to carry out a practical project applying theoretical knowledge to a specific organisational or management problem or issue facing a LINC company. Projects will be carried out on real situations that the companies face but which are not critical to their business. Students will gain experience in handling data in an organisational setting and in applying relevant concepts and theories from their programme of study as appropriate to the research context. Furthermore, students who choose to work with LINC companies will have access to the new, state of the art, entrepreneurship lab based in the LINC. The lab will provide a creative hot desk environment for students of the proposed programme allowing them to work in an industry environment while completing their dissertation.

Programme detail

Programme title	Master of Business
Award title	Master of Business
NFQ^I level	9
ECTS^{II} credits	90
Programme code	BN525
Banner code	BN_BMSBB_R

Exit award

Banner code	ITB code	Programme title	Award title	ECTS credits	Format
BN_BMSBB_G	BN522	Postgraduate Diploma in Business	Postgraduate Diploma in Business	Level 9 60 credits	Ab initio

^I National Framework of Qualifications

^{II} European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

Panel members

Chairperson	Mr. Dermot Finan (Registrar retired) Institute of Technology Sligo
Panel member 1	Dr. Ann Torres National University of Ireland Galway
Panel member 2	Dr. Sheila O'Donohoe Waterford Institute of Technology
Panel member 3	Dr. Cathal Brugha University College Dublin
Panel member 4	Ms. Maria Callinan Laois County Enterprise Board Limited
In attendance	Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan IT Blanchardstown Mr. Michael Keane IT Blanchardstown
Date of Panel Meeting	Wednesday 28 th April 2010

Institute staff present

Session I Meeting with Head of School and programme leaders

Mr. Michael Tobin, former Head of School of Business and Humanities

Mr. Pat O'Connor, Head of Department of Business

Ms. Patricia Doherty

Mr. Gary Bernie

Ms. Tara Rooney

Mr. Brian Watters

Mr. Liam Bolger

Session II Meeting with lecturing staff

Mr. Michael Tobin, former Head of School of Business and Humanities

Mr. Pat O'Connor, Head of Department of Business

Ms. Patricia Doherty

Mr. Gary Bernie

Ms. Tara Rooney

Mr. Brian Watters

Mr. Liam Bolger

Ms. Assumpta Harvey, LINC

Mr. Thomas Mulvey

Mr. Terence Sheridan

Panel findings

In evaluating the appropriateness, quality and proposed operation of this programme the following criteria have been considered and is hereby reported upon:

Strategic planning

The panel was satisfied that the programme is in keeping with the Institute's mission, that it does not constitute redundant provision and that it makes efficient use of resources. The panel following discussion was satisfied with the planned staffing arrangements but raised concerns over what it felt was an over dependence on certain staff with experience in delivering an NFQ level 9 business programme.

Evidence of consultation

The panel was informed of how a comprehensive research effort was undertaken to validate the need for and the preferred structure of the proposed programme. Primary research activity involved qualitative feedback gleaned from a survey of local industry and an interactive industry panel held on the ITB campus. Student feedback was gathered by means of a student survey and an informal discussion session.

The panel also heard how extensive secondary research activity explored Irish Government and European Union publications, Irish University and Institute of Technology course documentation, print media articles and web resources.

Learner employment potential

On completion of this programme, it is envisaged that graduates will have the knowledge skills and competences to gain employment within multinational enterprises, consulting firms and government bodies and agencies in senior management roles in areas such as human resources, sales and marketing, and financial services.

Protection of learners

Section 43 of the Act¹ does not apply.

Quality assurance

The panel was informed of how the submission had been developed and approved internally whilst complying with the Institute's quality assurance policies and procedures. The panel concurred that said policies and procedures had been applied to the development of the proposed programme.

Programme titles and award titles

Following discussion, the panel was satisfied that the title of the proposed programme, and its exit award is clear, accurate and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders and consistent with HETAC award titles.

Ethics

The panel was satisfied that the Institute has internal policies and procedures in place to ensure that all teaching, learning or research activity across the spectrum of NFQ levels is conducted / delivered in a manner that is both morally and professionally ethical.

Unity

The panel found that the programme design is consistent with HETAC's policy on accumulation of credits and certification of subjects, that it has an underlying unifying theme with modules bonded by linkages being either implicit or explicit. It was also clear to the panel how the standards of knowledge, skill and competence evolve throughout the programme as a whole.

Teaching and learning

The panel discussed with staff of the Institute the various modes of interaction practised with learners. Evidence of a clear dialogue was confirmed, enabling learners to develop and have available to them the support of academic staff.

¹ Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

Course management arrangements were discussed and included:

- Course handbook
- Course induction
- Dissertation manual
- Research logbook
- Dissertation supervisors
- Survey of students by lecturer
- Summary of survey of students by lecturer
- Survey of students by department
- Course boards

The panel following discussion was assured that the necessary staffing levels and sufficient support structures will be in place and commended the obvious energy and enthusiasm of the staff concerned. However the panel were of the opinion that further work was required to more clearly define protocols concerning the operational management, support and supervision of the research and dissertation delivery. See recommendation 9.

Relevance

The panel recognised that the proposed programme is in keeping with ITB's mission statement to serve the needs of the local community and that it supports two priorities outlined in the Institute's current strategic plan¹ namely, the achievement of a more diverse student community and making ITB a vital resource for the region.

Learner assessment

Through discussion with the design team, and from the submission document itself it was explained in detail to the panel the multiple modes of assessment, both formal and informal that will be employed. The panel were of the opinion that the use of reflective journals in isolation as a means of assessment be discouraged and recommended that another form of assessment be included to further assist the learner in acquiring the necessary skills and competencies to attain the required learning outcomes. See recommendations 7 and 11.

¹ Strategic Plan 2006 - 2011 making education accessible <http://www.itb.ie/AboutITB/strategicplan.html>

Standards of knowledge, skill and competence

The panel felt having reviewed the syllabi and assessment methods that learners would be capable of attaining the standards of knowledge, skill or competence relevant for this award. However the panel was of the opinion that the learning outcomes of the programme should be reviewed and brought further in line with HETAC standards. See recommendation 1.

Access, transfer and progression

The programme incorporates the established procedures for access, transfer and progression allowing students to choose from various entry and exit points that support clear transfer and progression routes within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Decision of the panel

The panel recommends the validation of the proposed programme including its exit award namely:

Banner code	ITB code	Programme title	Award title	ECTS credits	Format
BN_BMSBB_R	BN525	Master of Business	Master of Business	Level 9 90 credits	Ab initio
BN_BMSBB_G	BN522	Postgraduate Diploma in Business	Postgraduate Diploma in Business	Level 9 60 credits	Ab initio

Panel recommendations

1. Re-define the overall programme learning outcomes to further align them to HETAC standards for level 9 programmes in Business thus providing further clarity on the linkage between module learning outcomes, programme learning outcomes and resulting graduate skill sets and competencies.
2. Review the minimum entry requirements to more clearly articulate the specific skill sets required for non business graduates wishing to enrol on this programme.
3. Consider increasing the duration of the induction programme to a minimum of one week.
4. Consider using explicit descriptors in establishing criteria for grading coursework for example where reflective journals are employed as a means of assessment.
5. Consider replacing the changing environment of management accounting component within the accounting information for decision making module with key aspects of financial accounting and corporate governance whilst avoiding any overlap of NFQ level 8 content.

6. Review module content across the programme as a whole to further include and make more visible corporate governance and ethics and the application of same within the various domains i.e. services, finance etc.
7. Consider introducing a second assessment within the service excellence module in addition to the reflective journal to further strengthen the learning outcomes of the module.
8. Rebalance the proposed syllabus of the module strategy and leadership to further strengthen the content to that appropriate for NFQ level 9 whilst reducing NFQ level 8 content and broaden to incorporate emotional intelligence.
9. Review the research methods and dissertation modules as follows:
 - Demonstrate the linkage between the research methods and dissertation modules including the timing of specific related components.
 - Clearly define protocols and stakeholder expectations regarding engagement with industry.
 - Clearly define deadlines for all deliverables whilst stipulating protocols with regard to applications for extensions.
 - Provide an indicative list of appropriate dissertation topics with related supervisors and provide at induction.
 - Promote the use of a mentoring system to support staff with little previous dissertation supervision experience.
 - Consider pairing students on dissertation topics during the first cycle of the programme.
 - Prepare a plan for the supervision of students during traditional holiday periods.
10. Increase the weighting of the following assessments proposed in the module enterprise resource planning and business intelligence:
 - Proposal to implement a fully operational ERP system into a real or theoretical business, detailing costs, benefits and technical solution.
 - Research document on the use of business intelligence and their effectiveness in the Irish economic context.

The panel were of the opinion that these were too light relative to the volume and benefit of the workload involved.

11. Consider including an additional/alternative means of assessment to the reflective journal within the module innovation and creativity.
12. Make other technical and minor amendments as discussed at the panel meeting.

Panel observations

The panel commended the quality and detail of the proposal and the energy and enthusiasm of the staff involved. The panel however stressed the importance of not underestimating the challenges and demands facing the team relating to dissertation support and supervision.

Panel signatures

Chairperson

Mr. Dermot Finan _____ Date _____

Secretary

Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan _____ Date _____